Paideuma 28, 1982

ḤAḌRAMAWT TO ZANZIBAR: THE PILOT-POEM OF THE NĀKHUDHĀ SA'ĪD BĀ ṬĀYI' OF AL ḤĀMĪ

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The text of the *qaṣīdah* which follows, containing sailing directions from the Ḥaḍramī port of Sayḥūt to Zanzibar (Fig. 1), was transcribed at al-Mukallā in 1964 along with another poem describing the route from Muscat to Mocha. These texts were provided by my friend Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir Bā Maṭraf whose grandfather was a nākhudhā of al-Ḥāmī, a little port east of al-Shiḥr. I was later able to consult a better text with 'Awaḍ Mubārak Bagraf in al-Ḥāmī, where I discussed it with several nākhudhās.[1] Finally, in al-Mukallā in Bā Maṭraf's house we had the poems commented upon by a nākhudhā whom I was able to employ. Bā Maṭraf subsequently carried out further enquiries in al-Ḥāmī and has published both poems as a 'Study in the Yemeni Heritage (*dirāsah fi 'l-turāth al-Yamanī*)' in 1977, though so regional a claim is not quite appropriate; Bā Ṭāyi''s poem in fact belongs to the common stock of sea-lore of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and elsewhere. Bā Maṭraf seems to have obtained some particulars unknown to us in 1964 about Bā Ṭāyi' and he refers to a book of his, *Shakhṣiyyāt lā tunsā*, containing biographies of well known seamen and mariners of al-Ḥāmī, but he does not say whether it has been published. However, he is able to give us the date 1217 (1802 A. D.) for the composition of the poem.

Sa'īd Sālim Bā Ṭāyi' was born at al-Ḥāmī at the beginning of 1180 (1766) and went to sea at the age of nine. By the age of twenty he was a competent seaman and he became outstanding in his day among the mariners of southern Arabia. For instance, I was told that Bā Ṭāyi' became blind, but on one occasion when sailing from Basrah he is said to have had the lead cast and to have recognised his position merely by smelling the traces of sea-floor brought up by the lead when raised.

However, I do not consider Bā Ṭāyi' to be a versifier in the same rank as the celebrated pilots some three centuries before him, Aḥmad b. Mājid and Sulaymān al-Mahrī[2]; nor in this particular poem does he exhibit so extensive a knowledge of navigation, though admittedly when I showed these earlier poems to the local nākhudās of al-Ḥāmī, they said that their own knowledge of navigation had, in comparison, declined. The language of all three poets is similar and they all pad out their lines with hackneyed phrases and conventional clichés such as *yā ṣāḥ* and *yā fahīm*, traditional to the mnemonic poem. Bā Ṭāyi' is perhaps a little clumsier in his handling of language, though his text is essentially a guide for simple men in colloquial Arabic, and he may have had more knowledge of literary Arabic than he cared to display.

1 They included Karāmah b. Mubārak b. Hamīsh from Sayḥūt and the nākhudhā 'Abdullāh b. Nāṣir b. al-Asad of Haṣwayn (a Mahrī). They said that they have texts of Ibn Mājid in their houses but they do not use them nowadays. Other persons who helped us were al-Shaykh 'Alī Jābir Ma'mūr minā al-Mukallā, the Harbour-master, the Shaykh 'Alī b. Bū Bakr Bā Mu'aybid, and Shaykh 'Umar 'Abdullāh al-Kasādī who drew the compass. The nākhudhā from al-Dīs al-Sharqī, and Sālim 'Awaḍ al-Shuqrī also helped.

2 Their writings contain short pieces on the route to Zanzibar. See Ferrand, 1921–28, I: 67; II: 73–74; Shumovsky 1957: 86v–89v. Al-Qutāmī, 1964: 65–67, gives a much more detailed route (which seems, however, to have some mis-spellings or misprints) and a useful section (104–108) on Barr al-Sawāhil.

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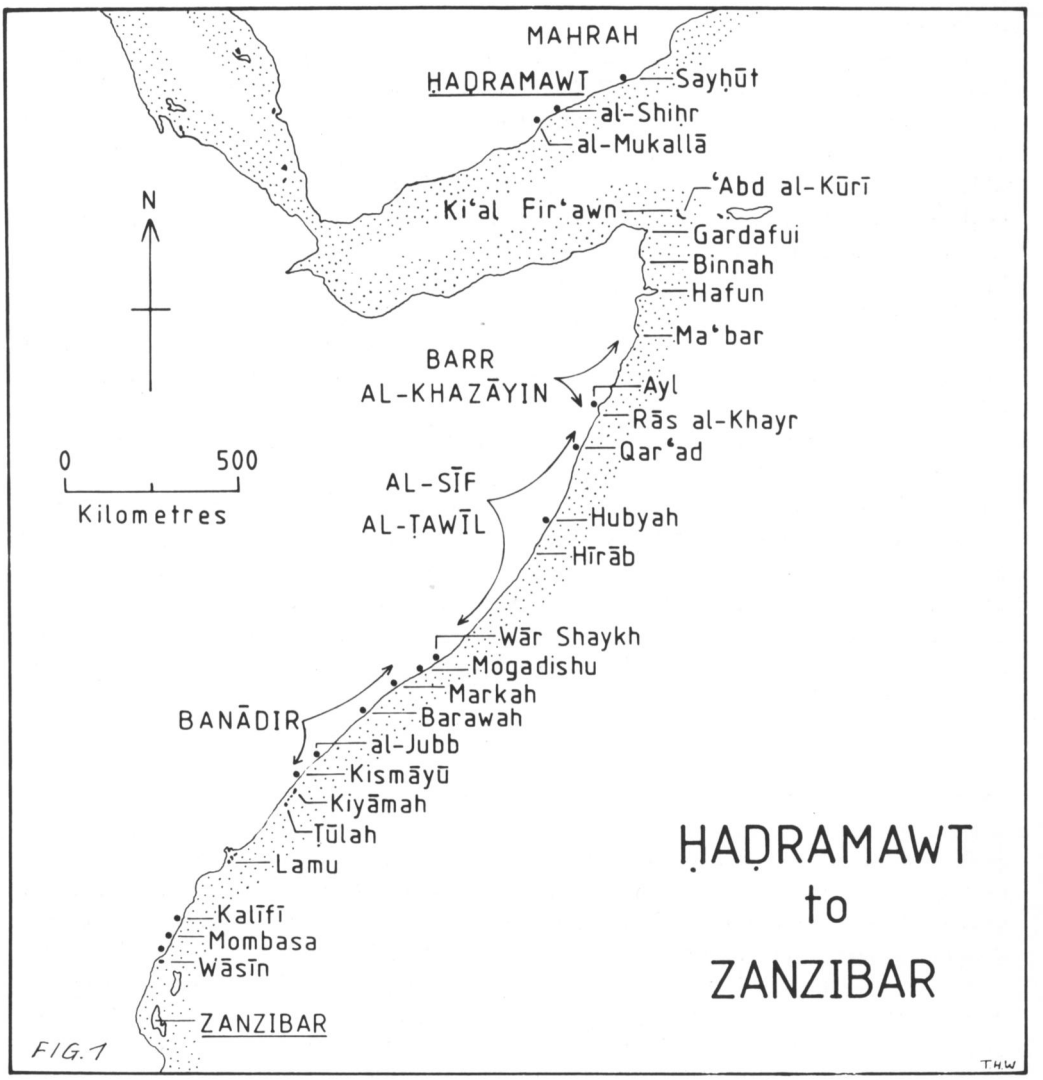

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For a real life account of voyaging down the East African Coast one cannot do better than read the excellent description of the passage by dhow from Kuwait, in Alan Villiers' *Sons of Sindbad* (esp. 63 *seq.* and 126 *seq.* on Lamu). I was taken to see his nākhudhā, al-Najdī in Kuwait some years ago by a daughter of the famous nākhudhā, the late 'Isā al-Quṭāmī, author of a pilotbook in wide use. Even she however found al-Najdī's colloquial Arabic difficult to understand.

Bā Maṭraf from his personal experience found that most Yemeni (which for him includes Ḥaḍramī) sailors know by heart snatches of Bā Ṭāyi' and his poems are still used by them and by the sailors in the Gulf. Bā Maṭraf's final text has some variants from my 1964 text. These are listed below omitting mere differences of spelling. Sometimes, as in verse 11/4 which is obviously slightly corrupt, I have translated his more recent reading. There is one marked difference in quatrain 28/4 where, in my text Zanzibar is called 'the land of masters and slaves'. Bā Maṭraf's version describes Zanzibar as 'the land of cloves', and he considers this evidence that Zanzibar did know the clove before 1828, contrary to the standard account that Sayyid Sa'īd b. Sulṭān introduced the clove to Zanzibar from Mauritius in 1828 (Ommanney 1957: 23). It is most probable that Bā Maṭraf's version of this line is a substitution for the original allusion to slaves, unpalatable since slaving and slave-owning have gained such ill-repute.

The poem is composed of quatrains in *basīṭ* metre, *mustaf 'ilun fa'ilun mustaf'ilun*, and in the same conventional form with the opening *Ilāhiyyah* verses addressing Allah and the *khatm*.[3] It has seemed to me worth while to print the Arabic since Bā Maṭraf's text is unvocalised whereas the vocalisation here is as I heard it from the lips of the nākhudhā, not a man educated in literary Arabic. Popular spellings are retained though formally incorrect. The grammar and morphology are those of colloquial Arabic. As pronominal suffixes are used rather loosely one cannot always be certain of the sense. In the English rendering, alternative readings are also given where of interest, separated by an oblique stroke. Interpretation or clarification of text is in square brackets.

The Compass (dīrah)[4]

The instructions for taking and altering bearings are easily understood by reference to the diagram of the compass (Fig. 2). The compass is divided into two sections, each called *nuṣṣ al-dīrah*, split by a line from the North Pole (*al-Jāh*) to the South Pole (*al-Quṭb*); the east half is called *al-Maṭla'* (the Ascension) and the west half *al-Mughīb* (Decline, Setting). The compass is divided into 32 rhumbs (*khann*, pl. *khunūn*) each named after a star, with 15 points on each side, plus of course North and South. Both halves use identical names for the fifteen points, and these have to be distinguished as to whether they are in the *Maṭla'* or the *Mughīb* sector. Each star is regarded as having an opposite star in the other half, e.g. *al-Thurayyā* of *al-Maṭla'* has *al-Jawzā'* of *al-Mughīb*, the latter being called *Raqīb al-Thurayyā*, the two points being East by North and West by South respectively. The interval between each rhumb (*khann*) is further divided into quarters so that there are in all 128 compass points. If the helmsman is given the order *inzil* he turns the ship northwards according to the number

3 See commentary to verses 1 and 29.
4 See Ferrand 1921–28, III, 99, with an illustration of the 'rose azimutale des Arabers' (91).

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Al-Dīrah

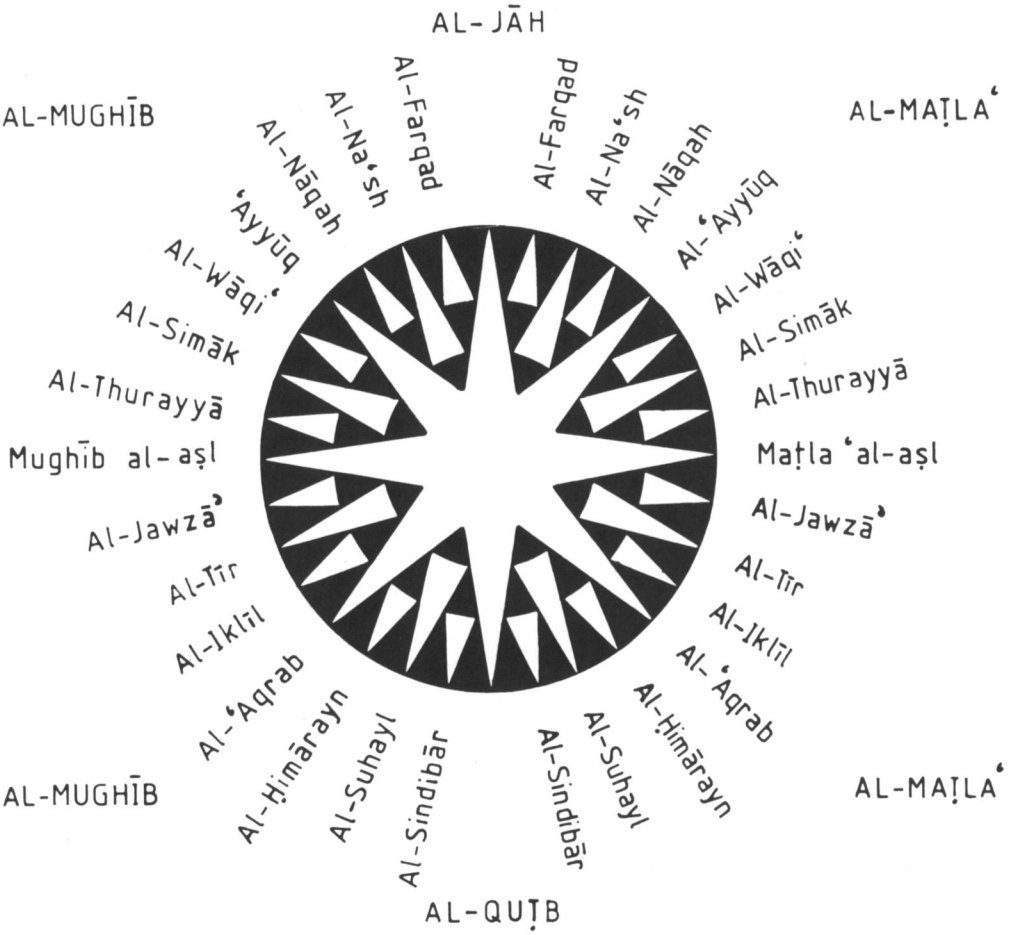

Fig. 2 Al-Dīrah, The Compass

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of rhumbs ordered, e.g. *inzil bi-khannayn* means drop two rhumbs from say, *al-Suhayl of al-Mughīb* to *al'Aqrab* of *al-Mughīb*. To turn in a southerly direction he would be ordered *iṭla'*. Parallel orders would be given for the Maṭla' or eastern half of the compass.

Time

The term *zām* (probably from the Arabic *zamān*) denotes a three hour spell, or the distance travelled in this time under average conditions at four knots, i.e. about twelve nautical miles. It is however also used for a six hour watch (cf. commentary to verse 12). *Waḍaḥ/waḍḥ* (pl. *awḍāḥ*), is twelve hours from dawn to dusk or from dusk to dawn. *Yawm*, as used in verse 4/1 is 24 hours.

Ba Matraf's readings

1/2 *Wasaṭ baḥr-an wa-barr* (adopted in my translation)
1/3 *al-Nabiyy Ṭaha*
2/2 *ṣallū*
5/1 *tajī-k 'abdu-hu*; 5/2 *muqaṭṭa'ah hākadhā ba 'ḍrib mithāl*
6/2 *fī ḍaw*
7/4 *wa-'intabih luh*
8/3 *kadha 'l-Rashād Ayl dhī mā-hi 'l-qarāḥ* (adopted)
9/4 *fa-lā takhshā*
10/3 *waḍḥayn lā*
11/4 *niḥnā wiyyāk ma 'ftakk al-lizām* (adopted, my text is unmetrical)
12/2 *yā ṣadr al-samar* (adopted); 12/3 *Murūtī*, without *al-*
14/1 *li-ayn*
15/2 *mustajāb*
16/1 *Kiyāmā* 16/4 *wa-'shjār*
17/4 *tijī Kuwāyūh wa-dhāk*
18/1 *Khawr Yāyā* 18/3 *maqtū'āt jīn*
20/4 *tushāhid-ha 'l-khiyām*
21/1 *mūsim-hun/hin*
22/4 *wa-aqdam amām* (adopted)
24/1 *wa-illā* 24/2 *la-hā 'alāmah* 24/3 *zilla-hā* (adopted)
25/3 *kullan*
26/2 *wa-ba'd-hā* 26/3 *wa-'l-qabḍ fī 'l-Sindibār illā wa-bān*
28/3 *wa-hū* 28/4 *wa-'dkhul bilad al-qurunful fī salām*

In 9/4, one text I saw had *ydhā* for *idhā*.

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قصيدة سعيد سالم با طايع
من سَيْحُوت إلى زِنْجِبَار

يا رَبِّ سَالَكْ تُسَهِّلْ ما عَسَرْ عَلَى عَبِيدَكْ فِي ٱلبَرِّ وٱلْبَحَرْ
بِجَاهْ أَحْمَدْ نَبِي خَيْرِ الْبَشَرْ رَحِيم قَدُّوس سَالَكْ يا سَلَامْ
وَبَعْد يا صَاح أَسْمَعْ ما نَقُولْ لا غَابَت ٱلشمس صَلّى عَالرَّسُولْ
نَقُول يا ٱللّهْ بِنَوْبَهْ وَلْقَبُولْ أَغْفِرْ وسَامِحْ وسَهِّلْ فِي ٱلْكَلامْ

سَيْحُوت مِنْها شَمَرْنا بِٱلْعَشِي مِن بَعْد ما قَدْ قَضَيْنا كُلِّ شِي
والقَبْض فِي مَطْلَع العَقْرَبْ وَفِي مِن بَعْد لَيْلَهْ نُوَفِّي كُلِّ زَامْ
بِنْجْم الحِمَارَيْن أَقْبَضْ فِيه يومْ ولَيلَتَهْ يا يِبَيِّنْ لَكْ رُسُومْ
أَوْضَاح بَعْد الثلاثَهْ فِي النجومْ سُهَيْل مَطْلَعْ قَبَضْ بَهْ وِٱسْتَقَامْ

نَجِيكْ يا عَبْد ٱلْكُورِي جِبالْ مُقَطَّعَهْ بَاضَرُبْها لَكْ مِثالْ
كِعَال فِرْعَوْن فِي ٱلْيَسْرَى تَزَالْ كذاك جُرْدُفْ مُخَاطَبْ فِي الكلامْ
وَلْقَبْض أَرْجَعْ كذا فِي السِّنْدِبارْ مُغِيب يا صاح مَعْ ظَوْءِ ٱلنَّهارْ
بِنَّهْ وبُنْها وَخُتْها يا حَذَارْ أَحْذَرْ تَحَذَّرْ مَعَا وَقْتَ ٱلْغَمَامْ

حَاقُون يَاتِيك عَالِي مُرْتَفِعْ مِنْ بَعْد ما قد تَوَخَّرْ لَهْ دَفَعْ
سِهَيْل لَخْضَرْ مُغِيبَهْ وَٱسْتَمِعْ هَوْلَ ٱلدَّرَكْ وُٱحْتَنِكْمْ لَهْ لا يَنَامْ

بَرّ الخَزَايِنْ ثَلاثَهْ فِي ٱلْوِضَامْ ٱلْأَوَّلِي مِنْهُنْ مَعْبَرْ وَرَاحْ
وَكَذا الرَّشَاد ٱلَّذِي مَاهِ ٱلْفَرَاحْ إِنْ غَاب هَاذَاك ثَانِيها تَمَامْ

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وثالث الوضح راس الخير جاك والمرتفع بر با يصبح معاك
نجم الحمارين يسمع لك دعاك إذا قبضته فلا تلحق ملام

سيف الطويل له علامة ظاهرة قرعد وصبيه معك مستاخرة
وضحين له يا خليلي شاهرة وبعد هيرابهم سبعة زوام

وان قلت زايد بعاها يا فصيح هذا إذا قد معك مسبار ريح
شوطهم با تجيها مستريح نحن رآياكم مفتك الزام

مجراك هذا في النجم الحمر هو الحمارين يا أهل السمر
وساير البر واتبع له وسر إلى الطروتي تبين لك علام

شجرة طويلة هنا بعد الكتوف كتفين جن حمر كلن با يشوف
وعاد قارة مريكوزة تشوف من بعدجن با نفرقهن بسهام

والعقرب الآن نجمك إتبعه لوين ما سار قد نحنا معه
بر البنادر جميعه يجمعه إلى براوه ومن بعده سلام

على الحمارين قد نحنا صحاب إذا دعينا دعانا يستجاب
أقبطه يا صاحبي طيب فطاب تصابح الحب هذا بالوهام

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وذا جَزايِرْ كِيامهْ يا فَهِيمْ طُولَهْ طِوالَهْ تَبعْها وَٱسْتَقِيمْ
أُمُّ ٱلْخَوادِير فى ٱلمجرا تَقِيمْ شِجار فى ٱلبَرّ تُنْظُرْهُنْ قِيامْ

والنِجْم هذاك لى قُلْنا علَيهْ وِٱنْ تِقْلِبَ ٱلْقَبْض خُذْ خَتّهْ إِلَيْه
وسايِر البَرّ وَتْقَرَّبْ إِلَيْه وذا كُوايُوه ذاك البرّ هامْ

وخَوْر يَايَهْ وشِعْبَهْ فى اليَمِينْ إِحْذَرْ تُنَزِّلْ معا لِى نازِلِينْ
أُنْظُرْ إِلى السَّبْع مقطوعهْ تَبِينْ ومَاندا راسها هْذاك قامْ

وكِتْف شَيْلَهْ مَعَكْ فيها ضَرَبْ إِتْبَعْ لها وِٱنْت نازِلْ مُقْتَرِبْ
دُوِّرْ شِراعَكْ وسَايِرْ وَٱجْتَنِبْ لا تَتْبَعِ ٱلْحُوشْ تِرْكَبْ عَ ٱلعِظامْ

وكُنْ مُوَسِّطْ فِى ٱلْخَوْر المَلِيحْ وخاطِرَكْ فِيه سالِى مُسْتَرِيحْ
إِنْ كُنْت كاتِبْ وقارِى يا فصِيحْ أُنْظُرْ يِسارَكْ تُبِيِّنْ لِلْخِيامْ

شَيْلَهْ وَلَامُو ومُوسِمها وَصَلْ وذاك لى فى مُرادَكْ قَدْ حَصَلْ
وِٱنْ كان شِى يا فَتَى مَعَكم بَصَلْ هُنا وفى زِنْجِبار السِّعْر قامْ

الصُّبْح نِشْمُرْ على جُودَ الكَرِيمْ فى السِندِبار المُغِيبْ با نَقِيمْ
نَصِيفَةَ الوَضَحْ والدّايِمْ مُدِيمْ رَجِّعْ سُهَيْلَ ٱلْخَضَرْ يُقْدَمْ أَمامْ

اَقْبُظْهُ باقِى نَهارَكْ وِٱتْبَعْ نَصِيفَةَ ٱلَّيْل وَالآخِرْ دَفَعْ
إِلى الحِمارَيْن وَٱلْعَقْرَبْ رَجَعْ تُصابِح ٱلْبَرّ زامًا بَعْد زامْ

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تِصْبَحْ كَلِيفِى وإِلَّى حَوْلَهَا عَلَامتهْ كِتْف عالى طُولُهَا
أَشْجار فَوْقُهْ طَوِيلهْ زُولها مِن بعْدها قُور مُمْبَاسَهْ تَمَامْ

وَٱلْقَبْظ هٰذى إلى وَاسِين فِيهْ نِجْم الحمارَيْن كُنْ حافِظْ عَلَيْه
وخَلّ كُلّيْن يَجِدْ ما يِشْتَهِيهْ وبعْد أَقْبُظْ سِهَيْلَكْ لَا تَنَامْ

اقْبَظه لُمّان مَازِيَوْهْ تِبانْ إِنْ شُفْتها يا فَتَى حِزْت الأَمَانْ
القَبْظ أَلسِّنْدبارى لا يبانْ راس الجزيرهْ أَشَايِرْها قِيَامْ

أُمّ ٱلدِّجاج الجزيرهْ والشجارْ وفوقها هى جزيرتْ زِنْجبارْ
وكُنْ مُسَايِرْ معا ضَوْءِ ٱلنَّهارْ إلى مُتُونى ودام المُلْك دامْ

خَلِّ الجزايرْ يَمِينَكْ والجميعْ وكُلّ ما قُلْت يا صاحِبْ سَمِيعْ
عَبْرُور فيهِنّ ذى طُولهْ رفيعْ وَٱدْخُلْ بِلاد ٱلْعَوَالِى وَٱلْخَدَامْ

وخَتْمها بآلنبى يا سامِعِينْ والآل وٱلصَّحْب ثمّ التابِعِينْ
ومَنْ تبعْهم على مَرّ السِّنِينْ عِداد ما قدْ سَجَدْ ساجِدْ وقامْ

تَمَّتْ وبالله التوفيق

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THE QAṢĪDAH OF SA'ĪD SĀLIM BĀ ṬĀYI' FROM SAYḤŪT TO ZANZIBAR

Introduction

1 My Lord, Thee I beseech, ease what comes hard
Upon Thy servants amid land and sea
Through the Prophet Aḥmad/Ṭaha's esteem, best of Mankind.
Holy, Clement, Thee I beseech, Sublime.

2 Now listen, shipmate, what I have to say.
Whenever the sun sets bless the Apostle.
O God, I say, repentance bring and grace.
Forgive, forbear, make the words come easily.

Compass bearings

3 Sayḥūt, from it at even we set sail
When we'd finished what there was to be done,
Course set true on 'Aqrab of the Ascension,
For a night entire wherein we keep each watch aright.

4 Set a day's course upon the star Ḥimārayn
And, on the night that follows, it will make clear signs to you.
Into the stars, after half-days three, comes
Suhayl of the Acension. Set course on it and keep to it.

5 Ahead of you appears 'Abd al-Kūrī – those
Are rugged hills. I'll show you what they're like.
On the starboard side 'Pharaoh's Balls' [Ki'āl Fir'awn]recede,
So too Gardafui [Jurduf], as my words intend.

6 Alter course now to Sindibār.
Bear westward, mate, in the broad daylight
[Toward] Binnah, Bunhā [its son] and Khutha [its sister] – look out for them!
Watch out! With clouds about, be above all vigilant!

7 Up rises [Cape] Hafun before you, tall, prominent.
Once it has fallen behind, set course
Upon Suhayl the Green, of the Setting. Give heed
To the helmsman on duty: watch he doesn't fall asleep!

8 For half-days three [follow] the coast of Barr al-Khazāyin:
Its first [landfall] is [Cape] Ma'bar. By it goes.
Rashād too, Ayl of the sweet water.
As that one disappears the next comes in full view.

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9 The third half-day Rās al-Khayr lies before you,
Sticking out [to sea] and by morning the coast is alongside you.
The star Ḥimārayn, may [Allah] hear your prayer,
If you set course on it you'll come to no harm/ you need fear no harm.

10 [Al]-Sif al-Ṭawil [the Long Beach] is a prominent landmark;
Qar'ad you have, and Hubyah [Obbia], dropping to your wake.
Taking, my friend, two half-days clear,
Then Hīrāb [last] of these places, after which [come] seven watches.

11 If you should say, man of eloquence, it needs longer,
This may [happen so]; [but] if there be a constant wind with you
You will arrive at the reefs there in good time.
You and I must keep a close lookout [for dangers].

12 Set this course of yours on the star Ḥimar,
I mean Ḥimārayn, you master yarn-spinner of the nights.
Go along with the coast, follow it on
To Murūtī and landmarks will come into your sight.

13 Here a tall tree, then the sand dunes.
Two sand dunes one sees, red both of them,
A low projecting peak, too, you'll see overlooking [them].
After these we'll divide them into shares.

14 'Aqrab now is your star. Follow it.
Where it goes we accompany it.
It covers all the Banādir coast
As far as Barāwah – after this lies safety.

15 [Now onwards] we keep company with Ḥimārayn.
When we pray let our prayer be met with an answer.
Set a true course on it, mate of mine, and all will be well.
By morning you'll be at al-Jubb [the Juba] or thereabouts.

16 These, man of insight, are the Kiyāmah islands,
Ṭūlah, Ṭiwālah. Follow them, keeping straight ahead.
Umm al-Khawādīr comes up on the course.
You see there trees standing out on the coast.

17 The star is now that [Ḥimārayn] of which we spoke.
If you alter course take the rhumb of it in its direction.
Voyage along with the coast, keep close to it
And you will arrive at Kuwāyūh where this coast disappears.

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18 [Now comes] Khawr Yāyāh to starboard, with its reef.
Beware of putting in [to it] like those who go [there].
[To starboard] observe the seven[islands], all separate, appear,
And Māndā headland rise up there.

19 Shaylah's sand-dune is by you – strike out for it.
Follow it [Shaylah], turning [coastwards], approaching it.
Then alter sail and run parallel [with it] but take avoiding action.
If you follow the port side you will mount onto the shoals.

20 Keep to the middle of the pleasant gulf
Where your mind will be happy and relaxed.
If, man of eloquence, you be a reader and writer,
Look to your port side and you will see [Lamu's] huts.

21 Shaylah and Lamu, now their shipping season has arrived,
What you were hoping has now happened.
If, lad, you've any onions with you,
The price of them has gone up here [in Lamu] and in Zanzibar.

22 At dawn, by God's bounty, we shall set sail
Fixing [course] on Sindibār of the Setting
For half of a half-day – for the Eternal alone is immutable
Then alter[course] to Suhayl the Green and go ahead.

23 For the rest of the day set your course on it: follow
It for the first half of the night, but in the latter [half] alter your course
And bear over to Ḥimārayn and 'Aqrab.
In the morning you will be opposite the coast, watch after watch.

24 By morning you'll be at Kalīfī and the country round it.
Its landmark is a high sand dune running the whole length of it
With tall trees on top. Pass on from there.
After it Mombasa's peaks come fully [into view].

25 To Wāsīn the course to set is upon
The star of Ḥimārayn – keep to it.
Let everyone find what he wishes.
Then set your course on Suhayl – don't fall asleep!

26 Set your course on it till Māzīwah appears
And after that/When you see it, lad, you've won to safety.
The course is on Sindibār until there comes into sight
The headland of the Island, [and] its signs rise up.

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27 [Then comes] Umm al-Dijāj the island with the [coconut] palms.
Beyond it lies the Island of Zanzibar.
Keep running along [between it and the main island] in daylight
To Mutūnī [Island]. [God's] sovereignty lasts for eternity.

28 These islands [well] to starboard leave.
And listen, mate, to all I have to say.
About them is a long projecting shallow reef,
And enter the land of the masters and the slaves/
And with safety enter the land of cloves.

29 Listeners [to me], conclude [these verses] with the Prophet,
[His] Family, Companions, then the Followers
And those who have followed them throughout the passage of the years,
As many times as one at prayer prostrates himself and rises.
Concluded, and in God is success.

Commentary on the verses of the translation

1 The Prophet Aḥmad is of course Muḥammad, and the term rendered into English as 'esteem' is *jāh*, which is difficult to translate exactly. The poet is beseeching Allah by the standing that the Prophet has with him. *Jah* also means the Pole Star; the play on words is doubtless intentional.

3 Sailing vessels from the Ḥaḍramī and Mahrah coast proceed first to the Mahrī port of Sayḥūt which is also a good area for fishing. Thence they sail to Africa, thus avoiding the winds of Cape or Rās Gardafui, also known as Rās 'Asīr (Bā Maṭraf). 3/2 means that all the gear and equipment required for the voyage has been taken aboard.

4 *Rusum* was explained to me as *ishārah*: signs or indications. Bā Maṭraf says that when this star Ḥimārayn "makes clear its signs to you" it means that when we survey our progress with the astrolabe (he means the sextant) we shall be able to determine the distance we have come from Sayḥūt to our present position.

5 *Ki'āl/ka'āl*, testicles, is a Ḥaḍramī word (cf. Serjeant 1957: 17). This feature was described to me as two small islands (*sayyilayn*). Al-Qutāmī (1964: 65) calls it *Qarāqir Fir'awn*. I was told there is much dust (*ghubar*), cloud (*ghamām*) and dew (*ṭaylui*, dimin of *tall*) at Gardafui.

I quote from my "Maritime and customary law off the Arabian coasts" (1970: 199): "When a vessel arrives at Rās Hāfūn, from Africa, they i.e. Ḥaḍramīs told me, the crew prepare a coconut for the Jinn to pacify them – after this there is *fawlah*, i.e. *salāmah*, safety. Sometimes in return for a safe arrival they sacrifice an animal. At Rās 'Asīr or Gardafui the sailors place some food in a little box and throw it into the sea so as to ransom themselves from the wrath of the Jinn who inhabit the mountains of Gardafui."

6 In the Gulf it is called *al-Silibār* (vocalisation uncertain) as in al-Qutāmī (1964: 179). Mariners have to be careful at Rās Binnah because of the islands and hidden shoals (*shi'āb*) under the surface.

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7 Sailors call Suhayl 'the Green' because of the greenish light it gives, as they call al-Ḥimārayn 'the Red' (*al-Aḥmar*) because of the reddish colour of its light. If the order "*Imsik al-najm al-khaḍar*" be given, you know Suhayl is meant. The helmsman on duty, literally the 'master of responsibility', must be consulted, according to Bā Maṭraf, as to whether or not it will be possible to hold the course to Suhayl since the winds and currents at Rās Hāfūn may at times force a temporary diversion. Two other hands must be stationed with the helmsman in time of need, or to take over when he is drowsy or in need of rest; those in training usually take this role. He quotes Badr b. Aḥmad al-Kasādī, *al-Qāmūs al-baḥri*, p. 76 (presumably printed but unknown to me), as saying that the helmsman (*al-sakūnī*) has authority over the crew in the matter of altering the sail from one direction to another and in lashing or unlashing certain ropes during the ship's progress (cf. Tibbetts 1971: 524, also quoting al-Qutāmī). The helmsman's assistant is called *qabḍī*, plural *qabḍiyyah*.

8 Barr al-Khazāyin extends from Rās Ma'bar to Rās al-Khayr, the latter often called Rās al-Khayl. Ayl lies at the estuary of the Najāl River where the water is known to be sweet should they wish to take on water (*yimizzirū*), a place for watering being called *mamzar* (al-Qutāmī 1964: 22).

9 Southwest of this Cape (*Rās*) is a sandy coast. After changing course to Ḥimārayn you are safe because there are no further difficulties at sea. With the main danger past, it may be at this point that ships travelling in convoy (*sinjār*) will release each other from the obligations that convoy entails.

10 (Al)-Sīf al-Ṭawīl extends nearly to Mogadishu. Rās Hīrāb is a black coloured cape upon its two northern thirds, and white upon its southern third – a small mountain on the sea coast washed by the waves (al-Qutāmī 1964: 106). *Hīrāb*, a keel, illustrates the long shape of this landmark.

Bā Maṭraf says that when the building of a dhow begins, the blood of a goat is poured onto the keel to divert the envious eye (*'ayn al-ḥasūd*), to drive away evil spirits and to gratify the jinni (*mārid*) of the sea.

11 My notes state that a *misbār* is a *rīḥ mustamirr qawiyy*, a strong continuous wind or *rīḥ tāris*; when the wind is *tāris* it is full.

Fishṭ / *fushṭ* / *fisht* (all used) is defined by al-Qutāmī (1964: 42) as a sort of soft rock, *al-ḥajar al-hashsh*, though by Bā Maṭraf (1972: 38) as *qishār*, which is a rocky area under the sea like the foreshore of al-Mukallā.

12 Al-Ḥamar/Ḥimār is probably simply al-Aḥmar 'the Red', epithet of Ḥimārayn (cf. note to verse 7).

The crew is divided into the first and second night watch (*zām awwal; zām ākhar*), each with a ship's cook (*ṭabbākh*) to prepare and distribute coffee. Each watch lasts six hours. With each watch also is a *ṣadr al-samar*, a man known to be adept at spinning yarns and who receives an extra supplement to his wage by keeping the sailors from boredom and sleep by telling his tales. Bā Maṭraf lists the type of tales he heard: stories of the Jinn; of World War I; of Adam; of Sa'īd Bāshā (the Turkish general from the Yemen) and his days in Lahej; of the punishment of the grave; exchange of popular verse (*muṭaraḥat shi' riyyah sha 'biyyah*): Yūnānī (Greek medicine); the Pharaohs; magic on Socotra Island; the spermwhale (*ḥūt al-'anbar*); winnings from lotteries; the virtue (*faḍīlah*) of clipping the fingernails; the raids of Badr and Uḥud; 'Antarah b. Shaddād; the terrors of the Day of Resurrection; mens' wiles; adventures of some sailors

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in large ports such as Bombay, Basrah or Mombasa; traditions of the Prophet on eating meat, wheat (*burr*) and dates; Anti-Christ (*al-Masīh al-Dajjāl*); popular folk dances (*al'āb*); gambling; the general conduct of the nakhudha, the serang and the clerk (*kātib*) of the ship – exciting much laughter and mockery.

Murūtī is a dangerous coast with many submerged rocks. The signs or indications of Murūtī are the waves breaking over its shoals (*shi'āb*), shining with phosphorescence at night.

13 My notes record that a tree on the coast is a sort of landmark, and the fish found off the coast of al-Sawāḥil is the *tirnāk (Scomberomorus commerson*). Bā Maṭraf speaks of groves of *nakhl Iblīs*, literally 'The Devil's Date Palm', but in fact, according to Landberg, a Yemeni name for the dwarf fan palm which is called, in Ḥaḍramawt, *naws* (*Arabica* V, Leiden 1898). Al-Qutāmī speaks of a reef the indication of which is "*nakhlat Iblīs ṣulbuyn.*"

In the vicinity of the groves are two mounds (*aqwāz*) of red sand, then you come to a small projecting peak with a black volcanic crest overlooking the two mounds of sand (Bā Maṭraf).

Miraykūz, explained *asmustaṭīl*, long is the diminutive of *markūz*, passive participle from the verb *rakaz, yarkiz/yarkuz*, ficher dans le sol . . . qu'il y reste debout (Landberg 1920–42).

Nāf means to be high, tall. 13/4 according to Bā Maṭraf means "We shall substract them (the two sand hills) from the account" after we have passed by them.

14 Bā Maṭraf defines the Banādir Coast as stretching from Mogadishu to Lamu where it ends. My informants said that the *banādir* or ports, are Mogadishu, Wār Shaykh, Markah, Barāwah and finally Kismāyū.

15 As you are now crossing the Equator you cannot use the *kamāl* (sextant), and you must come to the Juba using reckoning and the star Ḥimārayn. When you pass the mouth of the Juba River you will be opposite Kismāyū (Bā Maṭraf).

16 After Kismāyū you see the Kiyāmā Islands one after another in a long string; small islands, situated near the coast in a southwest direction. Three of these islands are taken by sailors as landmarks (Bā Maṭraf). Umm al-Khawādir, I was informed, is one of the islands and Bā Maṭraf says it is marked by groves of tall *nakhl Iblīs.*

17 After Umm al-Khawādir, if you want to put out to sea to avoid the reefs (*shi'ab*) along the coast, especially at night, you take a new course to Suhayl Mughīb, the new rhumb lying between Ḥimārayn and Suhayl. You have to watch the coast all the time till you arrive opposite Kuwayūh Island (Fig. 3). At this point the coast falls away from you. *Hām* is probably from *hamā*, Fr. *cacher*, "to hide" (Landberg 1920–42) (Bā Maṭraf).

18 You will now see the land on the horizon gradually coming up and Khawr Yāyā and its reef will appear to starboard. Near this *khawr* (lagoon) you will see small fishing boats over its reef because fish abound here. Your ship is too large to go to the shallows where the fishing boats are, so set a course far away from them. As you pass Khawr Yāyā you will see to your starboard seven islands separate from each other, the largest of which is Battah (Pate). Then there rises in front of you the headland of another island, Māndā (Bā Maṭraf).

Verse 18/3 was said to me to refer to seven sand-dunes (*qawz*).[5]

5 Editors' note: Captain Owen, in his *Narrative of Voyages. . .*, published in London in 1833 and thus

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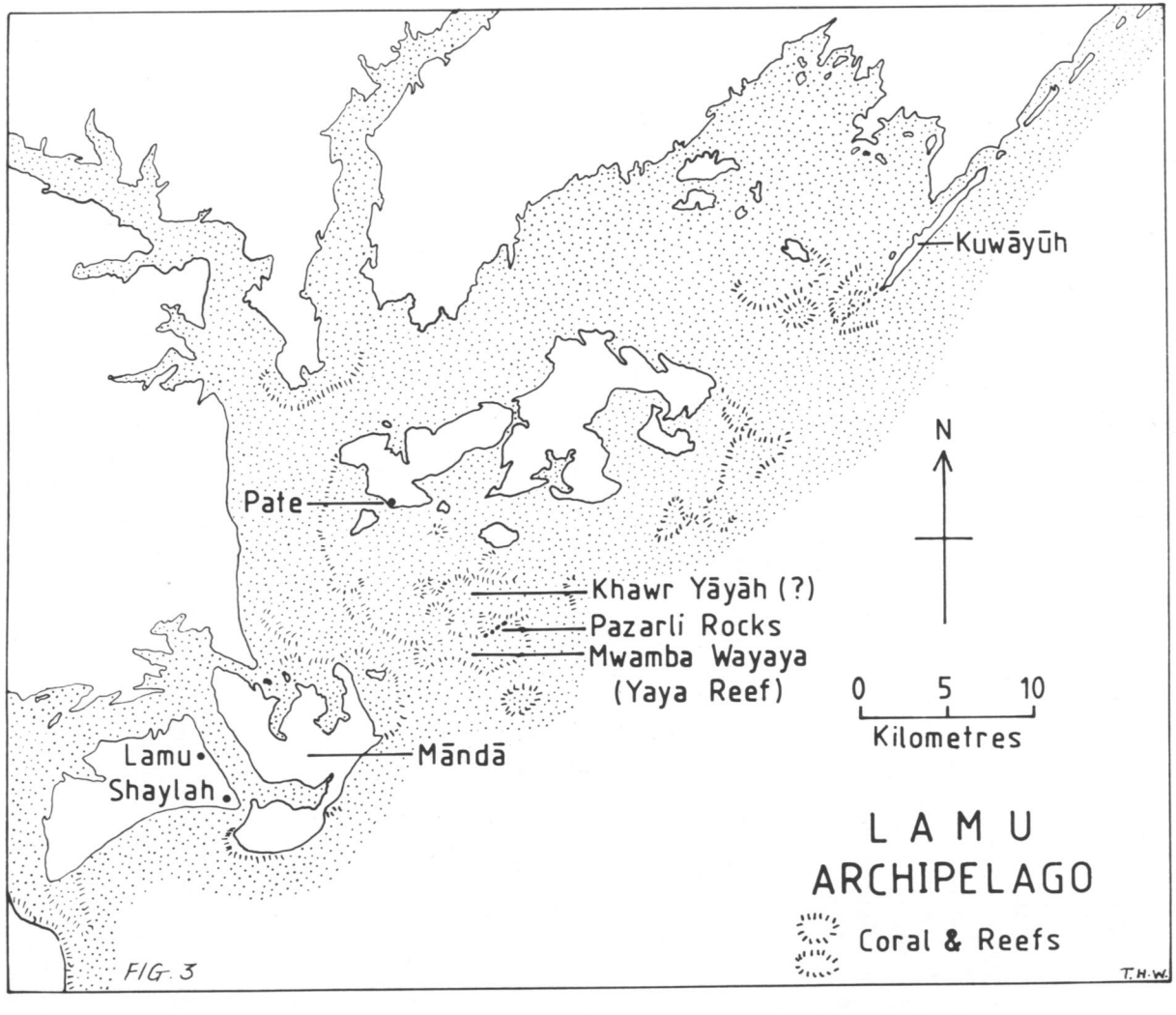

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19 You should approach Mā́ndā Island until you can see the sand-dunes of Shaylah/Shīlah (in modern Swahili, Shela) village on the eastern tip of Lamu Island, which loom over the low cliffs at the southern end of Māndā Island. When you get near the headland alter direction (*dawwir*: turn round) because your course will now be to the northwest so that Māndā will be on your starboard side and Lamu to port.
19/3 means that you should go slowly using the lead (*buld*) to ascertain the depth of the sea. This should enable you to avoid the submerged reefs extending from Manda and Lamu Islands, and to take the direction of Lamu (Bā Maṭraf).

20 In the middle of the *khawr* of Lamu you will avoid the rocky submerged reefs and progress slowly towards Lamu harbour. On the port side, on the south confines (*aṭrāf*) of Lamu you will see the 'tents (*khiyām*)'. Bā Maṭraf interprets Bā Ṭāyi' to be alluding to the fact that *khiyām* in classical Arabic means not only a tent, but any house built without stone (i.e. *'ushash*). To know this sense of the word you have to be *faṣiḥ* 'eloquent', and literate!

21 The sailors from al-Ḥāmī of Ḥaḍramawt, trading with East Africa, used to take with them articles of merchandise such as salt, dried salted fish, sardine-oil (*ṣīfah*) and onions (*baṣal*). These last, being the principal crop of al-Ḥāmī village, seem to have fetched a good price in Lamu and Zanzibar. However, my informants said that by 'onions', merchandise in general was intended. Lamu also provided relaxations after the hardships of the voyage (Bā Maṭraf). For some of the delights of Lamu, see Serjeant 1974: 167.

22 We cannot continue long with our course set on Sindibār in a southerly direction because of the waves dashing against the side of the ship, causing it to roll. It will be followed for six hours only and then we shall return to the course on Suhayl. The poet is trying to alleviate for the voyagers the distressing effect of the conditions while on this course, and he points out that neither hardships nor ease (such as they had in Lamu) endure for ever – Allah alone is Enduring. When they take the new course, the waves will dash against the stern of the ship (Bā Maṭraf). 22/2 uses the form *mughayyib* for *mughīb* to fit the metre.

23 For six more hours until dusk, the ship's course is set on Suhayl, then for yet another six hours till midnight. As they are some distance from land in this Formosa (Ungwana) Bay, the course is altered from Ḥimārayn to 'Aqrab to draw nearer the coast. Malindi seen in the distance is passed the next morning.

24 Kalīfī or Kalīfah, in modern Swahili Kilifi.

25 The voyagers have a pleasant view of the coast with its many trees. Rās Wāsīn is opposite Mombasa harbour. The ship passes on to Jāzī (Gazi) village (Bā Maṭraf).

26 After Jāzī comes Māzīwah (Maziwi Island). There are many shoals in the sea here. It is now time to prepare for entering Zanzibar and after a while there appears Unjūjā

written only slightly later than the composition of the pilot-poem, wrote of approaching the Lamu area from southern Somalia: "We now steered along shore for Lamoo, passing several islands, but none of sufficient importance to require a description, until we saw what we called the Pesanby Rocks, known to the Arabs as the Seven Islands of Eryaya, which is also the name of the great channel through the reefs into Patta" (Owen 1833, I: 363). This channel is today known as *Mlango Pazarli* (Swahili: Pazarli gate), and the reef *Mwamba Wayaya* (Sw. Yaya Reef). The Pazarli Rocks rise prominently above the reef in this area, are about seven in number, and appear on the starboard side of ships sailing southwards, just before reaching Manda Island. Although Khawr Yāyāh was unknown to several skilled fishermen questioned in the Lamu-Pate area, they stated that just inside the reef is calm water with excellent fishing, and it is probably in this area south of Pate Island where Khawr Yāyāh is to be found.

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(Unguja) Island, the largest of the Zanzibar islands containing the harbour and town. The ship now makes for the northern cape. Val Hinds has informed me that the Arabs are believed to have planted many casuarina trees on for instance Maziwi Island, and other places along the Kenya and Tanzania coasts to act as landmarks for sailing vessels.

27 Umm al-Dijāj, says Bā Maṭraf, is at the foot of the cape of Zanzibar Island (*asfal rās jazīrat Zanzibār*); it appears this must mean Tumbatu Island. You proceed slowly till you reach Mutūnī Island which you keep on the starboard side.

28 You keep both Umm al-Dijāj and Mutūnī (Mtoni, a little north of Zanzibar) well to starboard for fear of the *'ayrūr*, the reef, directly under the surface of the sea and which encircles these two islands, then bear to port and safely enter Zanzibar harbour.

28/4 Clearly in Bā Tāyi''s time, slaves were an important article of trade and in Ḥaḍramawt, Sawāḥil slaves are distinguished from Nūbah slaves. *Mawālī* (masters) can also mean 'clients' but this is unlikely here.

29 The poem concludes with the *Ilāhiyyah* mentioning Allah, the Prophet and his House, and the Companions and Followers in the traditional way (Serjeant 1951: 6).

Note: I have not found, on the maps and charts consulted, Rashād and Umm al-Khawādīr, while Umm al-Dijāj is only provisionally identified. The two latter Arabic names may disguise local African names.

Glossary to text

3/1 *Shamar, yishmur;* to sail
3/3 *Qabaḍ, yaqbaḍ, qabḍ;* set a course, bearing on
4/2 *Rusūm;* signs
5/3 *Ki'āl/ka'āl;* testicles
6/1 *Raja';* to turn, change from one bearing to another (T)
7/1 *Irtafa';* to go directly out to sea (T)
7/2 *Tawakhkhar;* to fall behind, *dafa';* to set course to
7/4 *Mawlā/ṣāḥib al-darak;* helmsman
10/1 *'Alāmah* plur. *'alām;* signs
10/4 *Hirāb;* keel, *zuwām,* plur. of *zām;* watch
11/2 *Misbār;* continuous strong wind
11/3 *Fishṭ,* plur. *fushūṭ*; reef (T)
13/1 *Kitf,* plur. *kutūf*; sand-dune. Syn. *qawz*, plur. *qīzān*; sand-dunes or hillocks covered by sand
13/3 *Miraykūz*; see commentary
17/2 *Khann,* plur. *khunūn/akhnān;* rhumb (T)
18/1 *Shi'b/sha'b,* plur. *shi'āb*; reef (T)
19/3 *Dawwar (al-shirā')*; to swing round (the sail)
19/4 *Al-jawsh;* port, opposite of *dimān*; starboard
Aẓm, plur. *iẓām*; submerged rocky area or shoal
24/3 *Zall*; to pass over a shoal (T), using Bā Maṭraf's reading
26/1 *Lummān*; up to, until
26/4 *Ishārah,* plur. *ashāyir;* signs, landmarks (T), sea signs.
28/3 *'Ayrūr*; reef, shoal

References to the glossary in Tibbetts' *Arab Navigation* are indicated by (T).

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